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DEPT FOR AF A A/S CARTER, AF/SPG, AF/E, AF/C
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SUBJECT: SHURA COUNCIL MEMBERS PROMISE TO ISSUE PUBLIC DECLARATION
OF DARFURIANS' SUPPORT FOR DOHA TALKS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a February 4 meeting with Senior Representative for Sudan Tim Shortley, Shura Council representatives from the Fur, Tunjur, Dajo and Birgit tribes expressed a willingness to issue a public declaration of the intent of the Darfurian people to pursue peace negotiations with the Government of National Unity in Doha. Such an announcement, which they hope to make in advance of (or immediately after) the issuance of an ICC arrest warrant against President Bashir, would be contingent upon their forthcoming consultation with SLA/AW Field Commanders, IDP representatives, and other civil society members, they said. The Shura Council leaders described plans to convene a conference of over 250 civil society leaders in the coming days to advance this cause, which they hope will spur the recalcitrant Abdul Wahid Nur to accept peace talks. Shortley pledged support for their initiative and advised them to coordinate closely with the JMST, Joint Chief Mediator Bassole, and Embassy Khartoum. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 3, Senior Representative for Sudan Shortley met with Shura Council members from several of Darfur's indigenous African tribes, including Dr. Idris Yousif Ahmed and El Amin Mahmoud Mohamed Osman (Fur), Jafaar Ibrahim Adam (Dajo), Tag Eldeen Siddig Ahmed (Birgit), and Ibrahim Ahmed Adam (Tunjur). (Note: Shura Councils are consultative councils made up of traditional tribal leaders. End Note.) Poloff served as notetaker.

¶3. (SBU) The Shura Council members expressed the urgency of seizing any available opportunity to pursue peace, and expressed frustration and dismay with the recalcitrance of Fur leader Abdul Wahid Al Nur. El Amin Mahmoud Mohamed Osman, noting that Abdul Wahid is his close personal relative, lamented that "we can no longer allow one individual to control the destiny of our people," and expressed worry that the Fur leader would become even more defiant after the ICC announcement. They acknowledged regretfully, however, that there is no clear alternative now to take his place.

4. (SBU) As a result of this dilemma, the Shura Council expressed a willingness to take on the mantle of the Darfurian people and issue a declaration of their intention to pursue to pursue peace, contingent upon a series of consultations with SLA/AW Field Commanders, IDP Camp representatives and other civil society. "As Shura Council we don't have a direct role in the political process per se," stated Dr. Idris Yousif Ahmed, "but at the same time civil society has an important contribution to make" at peace talks. They described the issue of Darfur as one region as paramount to any negotiations, and urged a strong USG presence at peace talks if and when they occur.

¶5. (SBU) The Shura Council Members told Shortley that they plan to convene a conference of approximately 250 civil society leaders in the coming days and to initiate consultations with a wide range of parties prior to making a public announcement, which they hoped would spur Abdul Wahid into acceptance of the Doha talks, lest he be bypassed altogether. Understanding that time is of the essence, they hope to make announcement before (or immediately after) the ICC

announcement. Shortley pledged support for their initiative and advised that they coordinate the announcement closely with the JMST, Joint Chief Mediator Bassole, and Embassy Khartoum.

¶16. (SBU) Regarding the situation on the ground in Darfur, the Shura Council members expressed grave concern at the possibility of retaliation against civilians from government and government-backed militias in the wake of the ICC announcement. They were also extremely troubled by the recent bombing in Muhajiriya. They noted that a UNAMID pullout from the town would have been "catastrophic", and emphasized the need for a no-fly zone to halt such aerial bombardments. They also expressed concern that, in their estimation, over 200,000 migrant Arab nomads from Chad and other countries have moved into Darfur and occupied indigenous lands. This has occurred mostly in West Darfur, but also in North and South Darfur as well, they said.

¶17. (SBU) Comment: To date, the efforts of Darfuri civil society to advance the peace process have been characterized by a lack of coordination, overlapping efforts, and clashes of personality. Though civil society groups may be intellectually and morally better suited to promote peace and reconciliation than the rebels, no one civil society group or affiliation can rightfully claim to represent all Darfurians. However, a public announcement as proposed by a respected group of tribal leaders such as the Shura Council would get attention and could advance the process. Given the current stalemate in Darfur, any attempt to spur the recalcitrant Abdul Wahid, or to find alternatives to his leadership from within the Fur community, should be encouraged.

¶18. (U) This message was cleared by Senior Representative Shortley prior to his departure.

KHARTOUM 00000153 002 OF 002

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